

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-1WASHINGTON TIMES
3 January 1984

Reagan will get 'new ideas' on Mideast

Jackson and Assad meet in Damascus

From combined dispatches

DAMASCUS, Syria — The Rev. Jesse Jackson finally met Syrian President Hafez Assad yesterday and delayed his departure from Damascus while the Syrian government debated his plea for the release of an U.S. Navy pilot shot down and captured a month ago.

A Jackson spokesman said the Syrians asked for the delay.

Mr. Jackson, a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, greeted Mr. Assad with an embrace and talked with him for about 90 minutes. The black civil-rights leader said he made a direct appeal for the release of Navy Lt. Robert O. Goodman Jr., 26.

The Syrian news agency carried a lengthy report on Mr. Jackson's criticism of the Reagan administration, quoting him as describing the U.S. policy in the Middle East as "harmful to the real interests of the American people" and "lacking in logic."

In his own statement, read by a member of his delegation, Mr. Jackson said he had a "warm and meaningful meeting" with Mr. Assad. "He has heard our appeal to release Lt. Robert Goodman on humanitarian grounds."

"President Assad is keenly aware of the emerging atmosphere in the United States expressed by three former CIA heads and (former) Vice President Walter Mondale."

The reference was to a call Sunday by ex-CIA chiefs William Colby, Stansfield Turner and James Schlesinger for pulling the U.S. Marine contingent out of the multinational peace-keeping force in Lebanon. A similar call was issued by Mr. Mondale, the Democratic front-runner in the presidential race.

Syria, an implacable foe of Israel and a recipient of

military help from the Soviet Union, has resisted pleas to remove its military forces from Lebanon, and opposed last year's Lebanese-Israeli troop withdrawal agreement. Syria demanded, instead, that the Israelis leave Lebanon without an accord, and has also opposed the U.S. peacekeeping role in Lebanon.

Reporting on the Jackson-Assad meeting, the official Syrian news agency mentioned Lt. Goodman only once. The dispatch said Mr. Assad promised the American visitor that "competent authorities in Syria will be studying the matter."

The delay in leaving Damascus was the second for Mr. Jackson's group. They were scheduled to leave yesterday until a spokesman for Mr. Assad asked him to change his plans.

The Jackson-Assad meeting was preceded by an argument between U.S. and Syrian Secret Service agents, who had been escorting Jackson and his party since they arrived Friday.

As limousines lined up outside the downtown Sheraton Hotel to take Mr. Jackson to see the Syrian chief — the exact destination had not been disclosed — the Syrians told the Americans that only three members of Jackson's party and a four-man pool of U.S. cameramen

would be allowed to go. The Secret Service agents were excluded.

Mr. Jackson waited in a hotel anteroom while the two groups of guards argued. He then emerged and agreed to leave his American bodyguards behind.

"I made the judgment to relinquish that service for that short period of time in respect to the sovereignty of Syria, of this government, and in confidence in its ability to secure us between this place and the undisclosed place we went to visit the president," he said.

Mr. Jackson and three members of his party, along with the cameramen, traveled in Syrian government cars to Mr. Assad's yellow stucco villa 10 miles south of Damascus. Assad has been recovering at the villa from a recent heart ailment brought on by exhaustion.

With Mr. Jackson, a Baptist minister, for the meeting were the Rev. William Howard, an American Baptist Church minister from Princeton, N.J., the Rev. Jack Mendelsohn, a Unitarian clergyman from Boston, and Tom Porter, Mr. Jackson's policy adviser.

Mr. Jackson, the clergymen, and his advisers and two sons arrived in Damascus Friday to make what Jackson called a "moral and humanitarian appeal" for Goodman's release.

Meanwhile, M.T. Mehdi, an Arab-American leader who returned to New York yesterday from a two-week visit to Damascus, said Syria would not release Goodman without an American "gesture of goodwill."

"Jackson's and my task is now to reach the American people to pressure (President) Reagan to make a gesture of good will toward Syria," said Mr. Mehdi, chairman of the Federation of American-Arab Organizations, who said he "paved the way" for Mr. Jackson's visit to Damascus.

Mr. Jackson was the first American to meet with Assad since the Syrian leader's illness. President Reagan's Middle East envoy, Donald Rumsfeld, has not had a meeting with the Syrian leader since then.

A Syrian presidential spokesman said Mr. Jackson told Mr. Assad he believed the Reagan administration's Middle East policy was one-sided and dangerous and that U.S. Marines should leave Lebanon and U.S. reconnaissance flights over Syrian positions should stop.

The spokesman said Mr. Assad told Mr. Jackson that Syria would not bow to American military force.

"Artillery will not bring any victories, and this artillery will not make the United States respected in this region," Mr. Assad was quoted as saying.

Mr. Assad criticized U.S. policy in the region and Washington's strong ties with Israel and charged that the two countries had decided jointly on the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the spokesman said.